

GRAPHICAL SIGNS AS UNIVERSAL SYNTESIS

by Italo Zannier

During the second post-war period, when the ideological ferment was particularly lively, photography was divided into the “graphic” and the “neorealist” photography. The latter seemed to gain the upper hand, especially from a political point of view, thanks to its commitment to social issues and humanistic provocation (at least apparently).

In photography Paul Strand and Henri Cartier Bresson were the winning figures, above all the latter, being an explicit narrator of the *comédie humaine*, while the masters Aaron Siskind and Harry Callahan focused mainly on a more private and unusual interpretation of the landscape, which was far from the views of the coeval Ansel Adams or Edward Weston, that were instead full-bodied, matter-like and sometimes even slimy. Siskind’s and Callahan’s minimalism, often essential for rendering the bodies of the subjects less thick, was also bitterly attacked by pre-eminent sociologists of those days, and even charged with inert formalism and hedonistic amateur practise (at least this is what I remember!), notwithstanding Steichen’s approval, who was smartly aimed at surpassing patterns of thought and immanent rhetoric and willing to accept new graphic formulas. Expressive forms historically implicit in Photography that in those days was living – just like the other art forms – a strong, even exasperated dialectic between “realism” and “abstractionism”, between sociologic “objectiveness” and (abstract and surreal) “dream” of reality. But all the images are like that in the end, including those – more rare and however polluted – *which are not photo images*.

Franco Donaggio has lived that same season later on, twenty years after, when by the time many pre-concepts had been clarified, even if with many difficulties. He faced with imagination the Idea of an enchanted metaphysical world. A filtered almost curried universe, so cleaned out as to reach the purity of the significant sign through a synthesis of the elements that must be essential in order to express simultaneously a suggestive concept of reality (here of oneiric reality), and sometimes even distressing like in a nightmare of a nocturnal dream found at dawn, in Photography. When thinking about Italian artists, Donaggio seems to me, without knowing or willing it, a Luigi Veronesi’s or a Bruno Munari’s hypothetical “disciple”; besides, many of his images seem to derive from oriental symbolists for their voluptuous style embroidered with virtuosity, including also the photo illustrating a couple of flying seagulls.

Franco Donaggio’s photography goes against the mainstream, at last!

An exercise for the eyes which proposes an harmonically structured Eden with lights and essential signs that invite us to discover the harmony of a landscape, perhaps not a daily one, but however intriguing as a concept, as a philosophy of the intimate reality, which is less known and here iconically recognisable.